

School Choice Behaviour of Independent School Parents

G.L. Briggs, B.A.

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in
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Abstract

One hundred and thirty-three parents of students new to five independent schools in Ontario were surveyed to investigate school choice behaviour. Parents were asked to indicate their reasons for changing schooling, the criteria for selection of a school and the nature of the search process. Parents were also asked to rank specific precipitants for change and criteria for choice.

Spearman Rank Correlation tests were run comparing precipitants for change and criteria for choice for the entire sample and sub-groups based on socioeconomic status, gender of the child and family size. No significant differences were found between the various sub-groups, however, there was a strong positive correlation between precipitants for change and criteria for choice.

Chi square tests were run comparing the number of information sources utilized in the search process, and a comparison was made between the importance of the various sources of information. The majority of parents were classified as active searchers, researching one alternative more carefully than others. Socioeconomic status was the only factor to have a significant effect on the ranking of information sources.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity and even moral preference are exercised only in making a choice.

(J.S. Mill, 1859, p.71)

The evolution of a compulsory education system in Canada and the United States has been accompanied by a decline in the range of options available to families within that system, in that most families are assigned to schools on the basis of their place of residence (Nault and Uchitelle, 1982). The public education system itself has been subject to considerable criticism in recent years, and Coleman (1981) suggests that the basic ideals upon which the education system was founded have been eroded by current trends in society. Coleman,

along with other scholars, maintains that one method of improving the education system is to broaden the range of choice available.

Sonnenfeld (1973) indicates that families do choose schools, either public or private, through a variety of mechanisms, and he proposes a tentative model for family choice in schooling. Sonnenfeld states that "Studying the processes, contingencies, and outcomes of families' choice of schools, however, is important, not only in understanding how the educational marketplace works, but also in formulating and assessing alternatives to the present structure of schooling" (p. 1). Doyle (1980), and Porter (1973) indicate that an examination of the reasons parents send their children to private schools might lead to desirable reforms in the public education system.

Picus (1979) traces the suggestion of parental choice in a 'competitive free market system' to Adam Smith (Wealth of Nations, 1776). Smith's views on freedom of choice in education are echoed by Thomas Paine (The Rights of Man, 1791) and John Stuart Mill (On

Liberty, 1859). The arguments in favour of choice are well summarized by Mill (1859):

...All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity of opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another; and the mold in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in government ... in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.
(p. 129)

From a relatively long heritage of proponents of educational choice, there have developed more contemporary critics of compulsory state schooling who advocate increasing family choice in schooling. West (1970) suggests that 19th century parents, who were largely individually responsible for educating their own children, did a commendable job in providing schooling. This evidence is presented to counter the argument that increasing choice in education would lead to an abandonment of the responsibilities of parents for providing schooling for their children. Indeed, West argues that the "... basic assumption or value-judgement

is that the individual is not only the best judge of his own interests but also of others (in his family)" (p. xxxiv). He proposes that increasing choice and competition in education would improve the diversity and quality of schooling, as most families are competent to make rational choices in this area.

Coons and Sugarman (1978) develop a lengthy argument for increasing choice in education without necessarily removing the government from its role in the process. They claim that more input in the educational decision making process should be provided for families, as they are quite capable of making intelligent choices for their children when provided with sufficient information. Smith, Barr and Burke (1976) suggest that "poor or incorrect decisions are generally made in one of two ways: first, people have inaccurate information or have misinterpreted information about an area of choice, and second, they have too little information upon which to make a judgement" (p. 121). Thus, one of the government's prime functions in any educational system involving increased choice would be the monitoring and encouraging of a flow of accurate

information about educational alternatives.

Another argument for increasing the quality of education through choice is presented by Kraushaar (1972), who states: "Voluntary choice provides a constructive basis for the growth of mutual responsibility and trust between the student and the school, with both parties having a stake in making the relationship work" (p. 11). He maintains that pluralism, particularly in education, is critical "... for continuous social renewal" (p. 317), and that governments should encourage and promote diversity in education with a view toward achieving excellence in a variety of alternatives.

Other notable proponents of choice in education are: Coleman (1981), Erickson (1982), Porter and Porter (1973), Seeley (1981), St. Pierre (1975) and Stamp (1975). Some critics such as: Braddock (1981), Fisher (1982), Kirst (1981), Smith (1981), and Warner (1981) do not agree with the extent or nature of diversification suggested by the above-mentioned proponents of choice, in that they object to the privatization of education.

The critics, however, do tend to agree that increasing choice within the public system is desirable.

A number of empirical studies involving school choice behaviour have been conducted in the United States (Frechtling, 1981; Shephard, 1977; Uchitelle and Nault, 1977) and Canada (Cogan, 1979; Kamin and Erickson, 1981; Peebles, 1982; Wayne, 1980). Such investigations have attempted to determine why parents withdraw their children from the public education system and what factors they consider prior to choosing an alternative school or system. Only three of these inquiries have been directed at the secondary component, and only one of the three has been Canadian. Moreover, none has looked exclusively at the Canadian Association of Independent Schools, so that this study will provide unique data.

If increasing family choice is desirable, it is important then to understand the behaviour of parents who presently make such choices. Hence, the present study attempts to answer three important questions concerning school choice behaviour, namely,

- (1) What causes parents to withdraw
their children from a school system?
- (2) What factors are most significant
in the selection of a particular school?
- (3) What type of search is conducted
prior to choosing an alternative school?

Limitations of the Study

This study focusses on the secondary level (grades 9 to 13) of the Independent School system in Ontario, and more particularly on a group of largely non-sectarian schools belonging to the Canadian Association of Independent Schools (See Appendix A). As there are 502 private (independent) schools in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982), and this study deals with a group of twenty-three, a wide range of school choice options is not directly considered. For example, parents actively choosing alternative unstructured schools or Christian fundamentalist schools will not be sampled. Neither does the study address the

large number of parents who choose private Catholic education from grades 11 to 13. Although a larger, more comprehensive study might examine the full range of available educational options, the prime objective of this study is to examine the process of school choice behaviour of parents who opt for a degree of choice normally not available within the public education system. Indeed, if the sample were to include schools such as Catholic private schools or Christian fundamentalist schools, the study might only reveal choice based on differences in beliefs. As it stands, the study examines the process of school choice behaviour within a specific setting. The selection of a sample from member schools of the Canadian Association of Independent Schools will adequately meet this objective.

Naturally, this approach limits the generalizability of the findings in that it deals with a group of parents who are afforded a wider range of choice than is normally available by virtue of their socioeconomic status. Garner and Hannaway (1982) suspect that "... higher status parents seem to make

better informed choices" (p. 120), supporting Sonnenfeld's (1973) claim, and Kraushaar (1972) notes that financial restrictions may "... limit the choice of many who might prefer a private school over a public school" (p. 10).

It is important to bear in mind this is an ex post facto study in that it examines a process that frequently occurred one year previous. There is also the danger that "cognitive dissonance" (McDonald, 1983) may come into play, in that parents might tend to attempt to justify an irrational decision utilizing rational arguments.

Given these limitations, the findings should nonetheless: (1) provide valuable feedback to the public education system regarding parental concerns, (2) assist independent schools in developing marketing strategies, and (3) add to the development of school choice behaviour theory.

Operational Definitions

The terms "private" and "independent" are used interchangeably throughout the study. Both of these terms refer to schools that are largely self-supporting, either through endowment or fee structures. This does not imply that these schools do not receive government funding of any sort, rather that the majority of their funding, and hence survival, is independent of governmental support.

The factors leading to change of schooling considered in the survey questionnaire are meant to address parents' perceptions of their child's previous school. Therefore a factor such as "lack of athletic programme" is not meant to imply that athletic programmes do not exist in a particular school, rather, that the parents did not find the athletic programme adequate for their child's needs.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the setting for the study and posed three general questions to be addressed. These questions will be expanded further in chapter III. Limitations to the study and operational definitions were also explained in this chapter.

Chapter II reviews the literature on school choice behaviour and presents a number of models of school choice behaviour. Chapter III describes the research design, including the development of the survey questionnaire and the data analysis procedures. Chapter IV presents the results of the survey and Chapter V discusses the findings and their implications.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter builds on two school choice behaviour models and the literature is reviewed as it pertains to each component of an adapted model. The first section presents the model developed by Sonnenfeld (1973) and the alterations made to it by Cogan (1979). An adapted model is presented at the end of the first section. The second section reviews proposed sources of dissatisfaction or precipitants for change of schooling, followed by a section on search activities and sources of information utilized. The chapter concludes with an examination of criteria utilized in making school choices and a summary section.

School Choice Models

Sonnenfeld (1973) developed a model of family choice in schooling which has been empirically tested at

the elementary level. He suggests that there is a range of different schooling options available to families in the educational marketplace, and that families utilize certain mechanisms to choose between available options. These mechanisms could include: (1) transferring students from one school to another, (2) transferring within or between school districts, (3) transferring to a private school, (4) moving residence within or between school districts, (5) not attending school, and (6) choosing between programmes offered within schools. Sonnenfeld further maintains that poor people and people with small amounts of schooling are less effective in understanding and choosing from the range of choices available. This would imply that the group of parents considered in this study should be effective choosers since they will likely be drawn from a relatively high socioeconomic group, given the nature of the fees charged at the sample schools.

Sonnenfeld also distinguishes between 'passive' and 'active' choice. Passive choice implies that parents do not consider more than one schooling alternative, while active choice involves "... serious consideration of multiple schooling alternatives" (p. 13). The identification of active choosers is based on

the assumption that dissatisfaction with schools does exist and there is perceived variation in quality among schooling options.

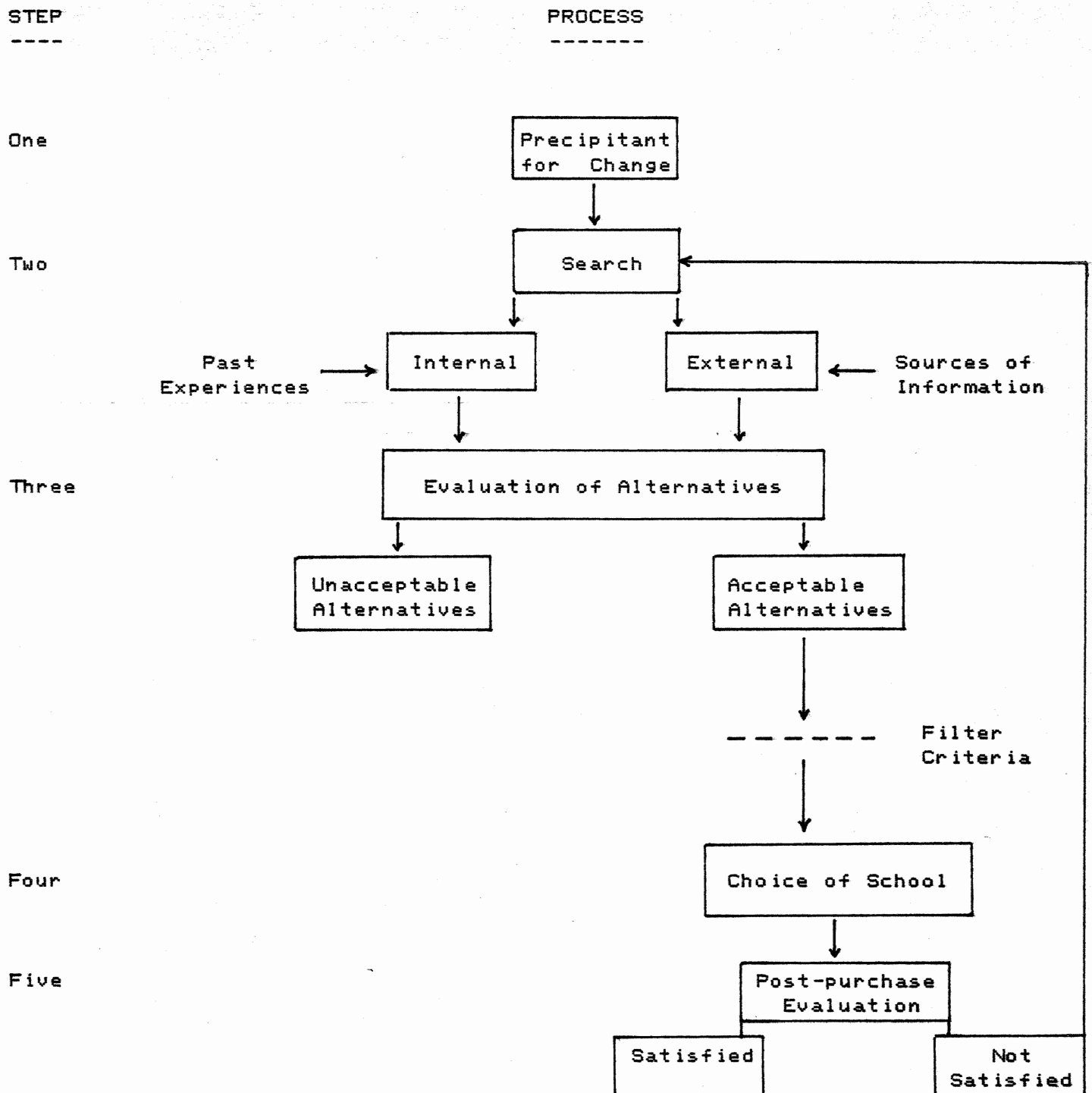
A five step model is presented by Sonnenfeld to explain the process of family choice in schooling:

- (1) Recognition of discrepancies between present and desired schooling.
 - (2) Search for alternatives.
 - (3) Evaluation of alternatives.
 - (4) Selection of school.
 - (5) Experience and reevaluation of choice.
- (p. 129)

The first step in the model (see Figure 1) involves a recognition by parents that a discrepancy exists between the present and desired quality of schooling. "'Problem recognition' then, implies that something has occurred to cause the family to question whether or not the schooling they are consuming at the time is the best they could possibly obtain, given their constraints" (Sonnenfeld, 1973, p. 14). He suggests that the precipitant for change might be caused by one or a combination of: a change in quality or cost of

Figure 1

SONNENFELD'S SCHOOL CHOICE BEHAVIOUR MODEL



schooling presently being consumed, a change in perceived quality due to increased information or a change in family status or aspirations. He posits that as the number of precipitants increases, so does the likelihood of change, and that the nature of the precipitants will affect the entire choice process.

According to Sonnenfeld, not all families who are dissatisfied with their present schooling undertake active choice. Families may choose to live with their dissatisfaction if minor in nature simply because they lack the resources to initiate active choice or they may employ "voice" (Garner and Hannaway, 1982) in an attempt to remedy the cause of dissatisfaction.

If, however, a family should decide to make an active choice, it undertakes a search process as indicated in step 2 of the model. Sonnenfeld categorizes searches into internal and external types. The internal search and evaluation process involves past experiences of the family, whereas external search involves the gathering of information from external sources. According to Sonnenfeld,

The information utilizing capacity of any given family is likely to depend on how much information that family obtains and on its ability to comprehend that information. The number of sources of information that a family has access to, in turn, is probably dependent upon the income, social class and race of the family; the length of the family's residence in the neighbourhood; and the extent of schools' and school districts' information programmes.

(p. 22)

Sonnenfeld goes on to suggest that the higher the social status and level of education of the family, the easier it is for the family to gather and comprehend information about schools.

The third step in Sonnenfeld's model involves an evaluation of alternatives by the family. He identifies five factors which might be considered in the evaluation process:

- (1) The relative valuation of sources of information.
- (2) The evaluative criteria used in comparing the alternatives.
- (3) The relative weighting of the criteria.
- (4) The relative importance of schooling and other goods and services.
- (5) The family decision making process.

(p. 24)

Accordingly, these factors act as a type of filter through which families pass information regarding various alternatives. Those schools which pass through the filter might receive more serious consideration, those which do not pass through may be discarded as viable alternatives for that particular family.

Sonnenfeld's fourth step involves the preparation of a set of acceptable and unacceptable alternatives by a family and the selection of the one that "...maximizes the net benefits to them" (p. 29). A fifth and final step deals with the post-purchase behaviour of families, which involves the experiences and reevaluation of the school chosen, and the possible re-entry into the choice process if a high enough degree of dissatisfaction is still present.

Cogan (1979) adapted and utilized Sonnenfeld's model in an empirical study of school choice behaviour in Coquitlam, British Columbia. The inquiry dealt with parents who enrolled their children in a Kindergarten or pre-school programme. However, rather than use a dichotomous model for range of choice, Cogan placed choice on a continuum as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

SCHOOL CHOICE BEHAVIOUR

Passive
No Choice

Active
Narrow Choice

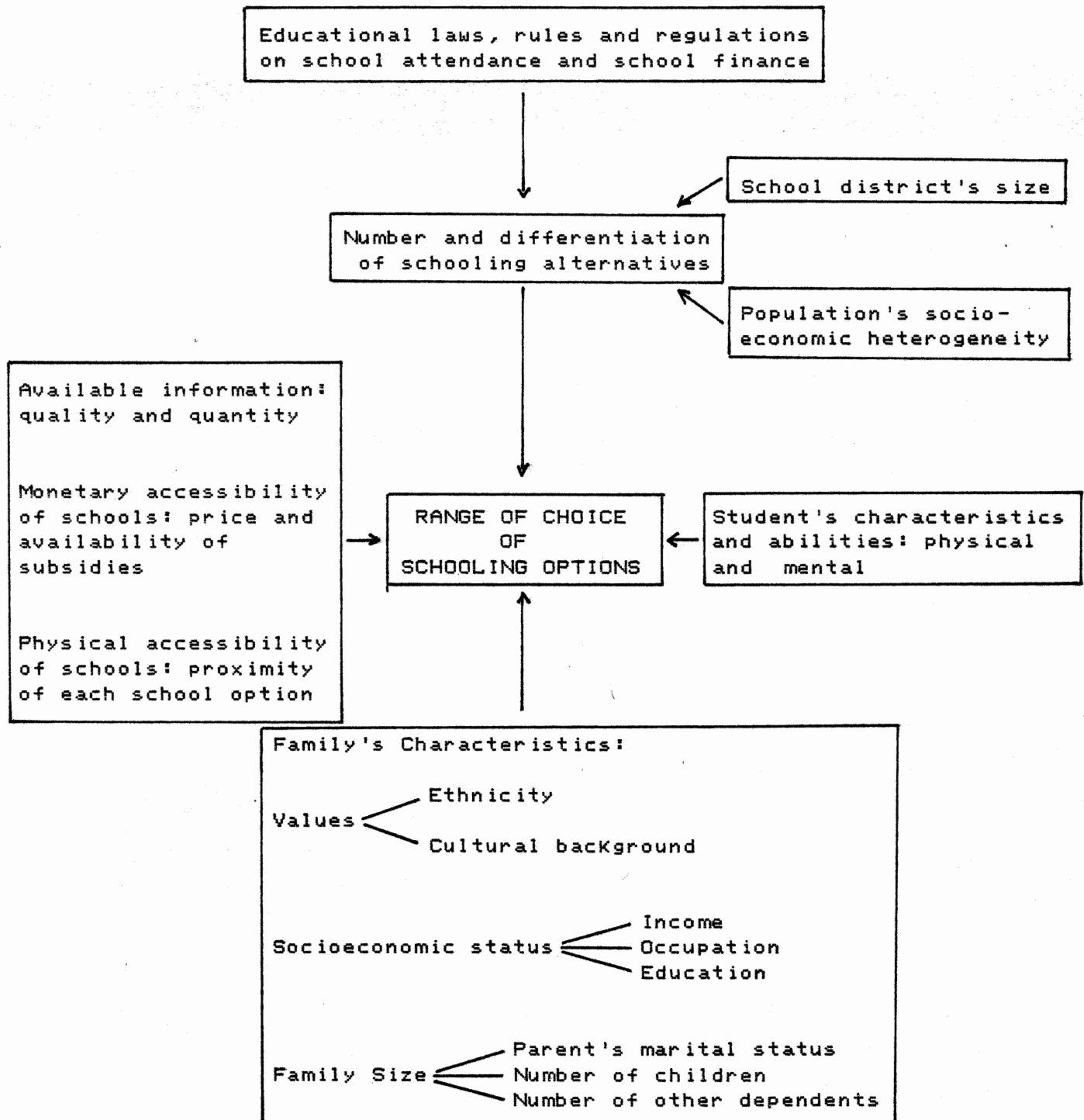
Active
Wide Choice
(p. 16)

The passive group is parents who enroll their children in the school closest to their home without consideration of other possibilities. The active narrow choice group considers one school carefully, and possibly chooses programmes offered within the school and the active wide choice group chooses a school only after considering one or more alternatives and employing a market search.

The Cogan model showing the variables affecting the range of schooling options is illustrated in Figure 3. Cogan (1979) found that:

Figure 3

VARIABLES AFFECTING THE RANGE OF SCHOOLING OPTIONS



(Cogan, 1979, p. 6)

(1) ...if only active choice behaviour is taken into consideration, narrow choice behaviour decreases as SES (socioeconomic status) increases, while wide choice behaviour increases with SES.

(2) The number of information sources parents reported to have used increased along with degree of choice.

(3) Parents choose a school for their children according to certain criteria.

(4) The rating of criteria by the parents will differ among different social classes.

(p. 37)

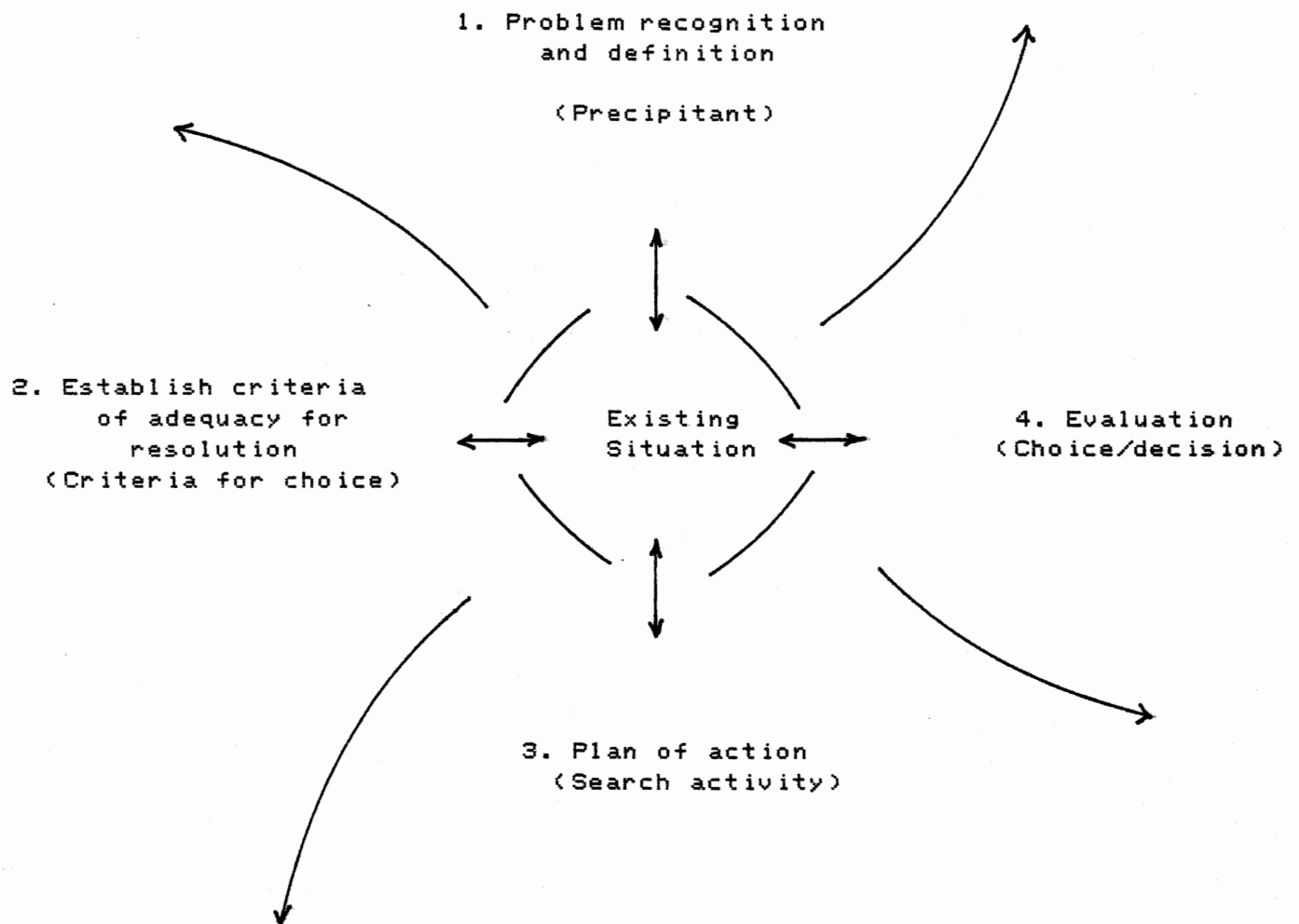
Working from the suggestions of Sonnenfeld (1973) and the findings of Cogan (1979), it is possible to present an adapted model as indicated in Figure 4.

The action cycle stems from an existing situation, which would be dissatisfaction with the present level of schooling by a parent. A parent would be involved in the recognition and definition of the problem, a process which involves Sonnenfeld's precipitants for change. Parents would then establish some criteria for a school which would resolve the problem defined earlier; that is, they would establish certain criteria for the desired school. A search for schools would follow, the nature of the search being related to the family characteristics. Finally, after an evaluation of the

Figure 4

AN ADAPTED MODEL

THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS: AN ACTION CYCLE



alternatives considered, the family would choose a school.

The model is not a linear one, which implies that families must enter the cycle at various stages and at various times. Dissatisfaction could occur with the newly chosen school, in which case the parents can re-enter the cycle.

The balance of this chapter is devoted to an examination of each of the stages in the cycle, and the factors affecting the behaviour of parents at each of the stages.

Problem Recognition and Definition

Wayne (1980) conducted a study in Toronto, Ontario to determine reasons for parents withdrawing their children from public schools, kindergarten to grade 8, and enrolling them in private schools. Wayne indicated that an important reason for withdrawal was dissatisfaction with the public school system expressed by parents in terms of "... the disadvantages they felt their child would experience if they remained in the

public schools" (p. 6). Table 1 indicates some of the reasons for dissatisfaction revealed by Wayne's survey. From the number of times "no difficulties" is mentioned in Table 1, it would appear that some of the parental dissatisfaction stems from the perceived advantages of the private schools; that is, the parents may not be experiencing serious difficulties with the public schools, but perceive private schools to be superior. Nonetheless, there is a significant number of other sources of dissatisfaction mentioned to support Sonnenfeld's (1973) idea of problem recognition as a precipitant for change.

Table 1	

SUMMARY OF DIFFICULTIES	

CHILD EXPERIENCED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS	

	No. of Times Mentioned

No difficulties	31
Unsatisfactory relationship with staff	29
Not challenged/stimulated	22
Lack of individual attention	21
Peer, social and personal problems	18
Poor disciplinary procedures	12
TOTAL	133

Shephard (1977) found three factors to be quite influential in parents' decisions to transfer their children in a study conducted in Seattle, Washington. In order of importance the factors were: (1) lack of assistance or challenge in learning, (2) lack of school discipline, and (3) dissatisfaction with curriculum or teaching methods. Other influential precipitants were: low academic standards, desire for religious/moral values education, school personnel disregarding parental concerns, and attraction to special programmes not available in public schools.

Erickson (1982), and Uchitelle and Nault (1977) indicated that parental choices, and presumably precipitants for change, were associated with income, education obtained and occupational status. Garner and Hannaway (1982) allude to the fact that willingness to pay for private education, assuming dissatisfaction with the public system, may differ by parent occupation. If parent occupation is an indicator of socioeconomic status, then we might expect to see a relationship between socioeconomic status, precipitants for choice, search patterns and criteria for school choice.

Presumably, family size might influence the decision-making process (Gemello and Osman, 1982; Cogan, 1979). Families with more than one child might decide not to seek alternative schooling due to the high cost of sending two or three children to independent, fee-charging schools. These families might employ the mechanism of voice to deal with the sources of dissatisfaction.

One factor which is not dealt with in the studies mentioned is the gender of the child. This factor will be an exploratory one in the present study. An attempt will be made to determine what impact, if any, gender has on the school choice process.

Criteria for Adequacy of Resolution (School Choice)

Sonnenfeld (1973) has suggested that there are a variety of evaluative criteria that may be employed by families in the school choice process. These evaluative criteria include: distance from home, transportation facilities, type of program, quality of the teaching staff, teacher-student ratio, nature of the student body, physical plant and monetary cost.

Criteria for choice identified by Nault and Uchitelle (1982) were found to be different for different families, a finding confirmed by Garner and Hannaway (1982). However, some of the more important reasons for choice identified by Nault and Uchitelle were, in order of importance, philosophy of the school principal, teaching styles and curriculum. Physical facilities, achievement levels and convenience of transportation were least important to parents selecting elementary schools. The researchers caution that their sample was "... unusually well educated" and therefore "... not fully representative of American school users" (p. 34), but go on to state that their responses to school choice options provide useful information concerning multi-option programs of schooling.

Reasons for choosing particular schools most commonly mentioned by Kamin and Erickson (1981) were, in order of importance, religion and spirituality, strict discipline and academic/teaching quality. The small size of school and family tradition were important considerations to parents choosing the one non-sectarian independent school, although the number of parents involved in this case was quite small.

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Wayne (1980), in surveying elementary school parents, likewise identified a number of reasons for parental selection of a particular school. As shown in Table 2 there are eleven options. When the important and secondary choices are combined, one can rank the five most important considerations as: (1) quality of instruction, (2) class size, (3) preparation for university, (4) behaviour and discipline, and (5) personal needs. The study also revealed that special programmes such as athletics, enrichment and French were perceived as superior in private schools, and that private schools were superior in the teaching of life skills such as responsibility, independence and creativity.

Peebles (1982), in a North York, Ontario study, confirmed Wayne's findings. Peebles, however, identified one additional reason for choice, namely, family tradition or a long standing desire for private education.

Other studies support, in general, the choice criteria outlined in this review. For instance, Erickson (1982) in British Columbia, Frechtling (1981)

Table 2

RATINGS GIVEN TO VARIOUS "REASONS" FOR
SELECTING A PRIVATE SCHOOL EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE

	An Important Consideration	A Secondary Consideration	Of No Significance	Can't Answer
Proximity to home	8%	35%	57%	0%
Segregated education	6%	15%	77%	2%
Class size	72%	16%	12%	0%
Relatives at private school	11%	27%	62%	0%
Specialized Programs	48%	16%	36%	0%
Problems with local school	54%	15%	30%	1%
Quality of instruction	81%	10%	9%	0%
Preparation for university	65%	14%	21%	0%
Social atmosphere	29%	27%	44%	0%
Personal needs	49%	26%	25%	0%
Behaviour and discipline	64%	15%	21%	0%

in Maryland and Kraushaar (1972) in nonpublic schools in the United States each, in varying degrees, support the outlined criteria. The 1982 Gallup Poll on education also indicated that public school parents would prefer private schools for the same types of reasons outlined, if provided with the opportunity.

Plan of Action (Search)

Kamin and Erickson (1981) conducted a survey of British Columbia parents of both elementary and secondary level students in an attempt to examine search activities and criteria for school choice. Their sample was over-representative of the middle class as opposed to the working class and they specifically discovered that the patrons of the one non-sectarian independent school in the sample had high socioeconomic status, a high degree of education and backgrounds in independent schools. Kamin and Erickson indicate that "higher social status not only increases the likelihood that parents will shift their children from one school to another, but that the shift will be from public to independent schools" (p. 5). Part of this shift might be explained by the desire of these parents to have

their children "... with one's own Kind" (Kraushaar, 1972, p. 10). Kamin and Erickson also suggest that parents with higher socioeconomic status would be more likely to transfer their children if concerns over present schooling developed.

Uchitelle and Nault (1977), in a study of school choice behaviour of elementary school parents living in optional attendance zones for public schools in the United States, found that a majority of parents surveyed, researched and pondered the schooling alternatives available to them before choosing a school. Parents were classified as either searchers or non-searchers, the searchers being those parents who visited one or more schools and seriously considered their decision while non-searchers usually selected the closest school without much consideration of the alternatives. As noted above, Uchitelle and Nault indicate that active search parents were more common among parents with a higher socioeconomic status and that there was a positive relationship between high levels of education and increased awareness of school choice options available. Wayne's (1980) study suggests that 67 percent of the parents sampled considered two or more alternatives prior to selecting a school, which

would place them in the active wide search category. These findings are further confirmed by Fisher (1982) who suggested that parents are unlikely to change their child's school without serious thought.

Uchitelle and Nault (1977) found that the most important sources of information for parents were discussions with friends regarding schools and visits to the schools to talk to staff and observe classes. Kamin and Erickson (1981) hypothesize that parents with higher socioeconomic status have superior social skills and greater access to information. This group would be accustomed to demanding above average goods and have a greater sense of control over their destinies, which would lead them to an increased awareness of educational alternatives.

In terms of sources of information utilized, Kamin and Erickson (1981) found that parents often spoke with other people who had children in the school under investigation, this being particularly significant for parents of the independent school. Talks with friends or relatives, sermons or speeches and the mass media were also important sources of information for decision making. The researchers also note an inverse

relationship between social class and the influence of school literature and suggest that "... higher status parents are more wary of what schools say about themselves" (p. 4). As well, the study suggests that higher status parents tend to rely more upon the mass media than do lower status parents.

Garner and Hannaway (1982) note that imperfect market conditions exist in education since the schools (producers) are often unable to specify the effects of their schooling and the parents (consumers) are often generally unaware of the workings of schools. This condition complicates the school choice process and may result in inappropriate decisions being made by families. The existence of imperfect market conditions also illustrates the need for schools to provide detailed, accurate information to potential parents and the importance of wide search activities, involving a variety of sources of information. Kraushaar (1972), on the other hand, maintains that:

Most parents, in choosing a school, do not rest the decision on an objective exploration of various alternatives; the choice is usually conditioned a priori by religious, social or academic family interests which greatly narrow the range of choice to start with; and the advice

of friends, relatives, and perhaps a few school visits lay the groundwork for the final decision.

(p. 103)

Chapter Summary

The model presented has been utilized as a basis for empirical studies in a variety of settings. Each component of the adapted model (Figure 4) has been discussed from the perspective of previous research, and it would appear that the model is a viable one.

The precipitants for change appear to be related to parents' perceptions of problems in the public education system and the apparent advantages of independent schools. These problems might range from general difficulties with the parent's local public system, such as teacher strikes or drug use and violence associated with local schools, to more individual difficulties such as a child's need for greater supervision or structure, which could be met by smaller class sizes, or the desire for a more rigorous and challenging curriculum. Although there might be a wide range of precipitants, the existence of a gap between the present and desired level of educational service is

critical to the choice process discussed in this study.

Another significant precipitant for change could be the existence of traditional ties with private education. Gossage (1977), for instance, alludes to the importance of the "old boy network", consequently, one might expect a significant number of independent school parents to have had some previous connection to independent education. This connection might limit the parents' range of search activities, although with the significant expenditure associated with independent schools, it is expected that parents would consider their choices carefully.

Apparently, there should be a close relationship between the precipitants for change and the criteria for school choice. Parents who are dissatisfied with the present level of schooling would presumably seek alternatives which would address the sources of dissatisfaction. The literature reviewed in this chapter does not develop that relationship, and one of the prime objectives of this study is to explore the relationship between precipitants for change and criteria for choice.

The text now turns to an examination of school choice behaviour of parents within a specific setting. Chapter III presents a description of the research design and data analysis procedures.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Reiterated from Chapter I, this study addresses three major questions:

- (1) What causes parents to withdraw their children from a school system?
- (2) What factors are most significant in the selection of a particular school?
- (3) What type of search is conducted prior to choosing an alternative school?

Chapter II presented a conceptual model (Figure 4) for discussing the school choice process. It is apparent from the model that, stemming from an existing situation involving dissatisfaction with schooling, a parent would define the problem in terms of precipitants for change. The parent would then establish some criteria for resolving the problem (criteria for choice) and begin to search for alternatives. After weighing

the advantages and disadvantages of the various alternatives, the parent would choose a new school, or conceivably withdraw from the cyle if present schooling were still advantageous.

Specifically, this study will attempt to answer the following questions:

(1) a.) What would be the rank-ordering of the following precipitants for change?

- i. Academic concerns such as low academic standards, lack of sufficient assistance or challenge in learning, dissatisfaction with curriculum/teaching methods.
- ii. Lack of discipline or behaviour problems.
- iii. School climate concerns such as school personnel not listening to parental concerns, problems with teachers or other students, lack of accessibility to school staff.
- iv. Lack of religious/moral education.
- v. Lack of a strong athletic programme.
- vi. Desire for special programme not available in previous school.
- vii. Desire for single sex or co-educational schooling.

viii. Long standing desire/preference for private schooling.

b.) Are there any other important precipitants?

c.) What is the impact, if any, of SES, family size or gender of the child on the rank-ordering of precipitants?

(2) a.) What would be the rank-ordering of the following criteria for choice?

- i. Academic concerns such as quality of instruction/curriculum, preparation for university/career, level of achievement of former pupils.
- ii. Attention to behaviour or discipline.
- iii. School climate concerns such as general atmosphere of the school, Headmaster's attitude, accessibility of the teachers.
- iv. Availability of religious/moral education.
- v. Strong athletic programme.
- vi. Special programmes offered.
- vii. Desire for single sex or co-educational

schooling.

viii. Desire/preference for private schooling.

b.) What other factors would parents consider before selecting a school?

c.) What relationship exists between the rank-ordering of precipitants for change and criteria for choice?

d.) Does the relationship between precipitants for change and criteria for choice vary with SES, family size or gender of the child?

(3) What is the range of search and number of sources of information utilized by parents after a decision to change schools?

a.) How many schools are examined?

b.) How many sources of information are utilized during the search process, and what types of sources are used?

c.) What is the impact, if any, of SES, family size or gender of the child on the search process?

General Population

One difficulty with the identification of the sample and its relationship to the population is the lack of availability of detailed statistics on private school enrollments. Working from the Ontario Ministry of Education statistics for 1982, it is possible to show the number and source of students entering private schools in Ontario for the school year 1981-82 (Figure 5). The number and direction of withdrawals are also shown for reference purposes. Extrapolating from this data one can predict the enrollment of 18,353 students in the secondary level of private schools for the year 1981-82. Using an annual growth rate of 2.8 percent (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982), one can project an enrollment of 19,395 students in the secondary level of private schools in Ontario in 1983-84, the school year under consideration in this study. This then would be the approximate size of the group from which the target population is defined.

Figure 5

ONTARIO PRIVATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS/WITHDRAWALS (1981/82)

Admissions:

Source	Number	%
Pupils entering from publicly supported schools	18,132	56
Pupils from outside Ontario	4,740	15
Beginners - pupils entering school for the first time	4,639	14
Pupils enrolled previously in another Ontario private school	3,756	12
Pupils re-entering after a period of non-attendance at any school	931	3
	32,198	100

Withdrawals:

Direction	Number	%
To other training or education	11,426	38
To publicly supported schools	8,930	30
Transfers to other private schools	3,702	12
To enter employment in Ontario	2,594	9
Left Ontario	2,422	8
Other	888	3
	29,962	100

Source: Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982

Target Population

The twenty-three C.A.I.S. Ontario member schools enrolled 10,347 students from pre-Kindergarten to grade thirteen in the 1982-83 school year (Canadian Association of Independent Schools, 1983). Again, due to the lack of availability of detailed enrollment statistics for these schools, we must extrapolate total enrollment in 1983-84 as 10,637 using the previously mentioned 2.8 percent growth rate. If 57 percent of all private school students are at the secondary level (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982), then we would expect 6,063 students to be at the secondary level in the twenty-three C.A.I.S. schools. If 40 percent of students are new admissions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982), then we would expect 2,425 new secondary level students to have enrolled in Ontario member C.A.I.S. schools in the school year 1983-84. The target population from which the sample is drawn is the parents of these 2,425 students.

Sample

The independent schools in the target group can be classified into the following categories:

Co-educational a) boarding schools

b) day schools

Single sex a) boarding schools

b) day schools.

A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure that each category was considered and to allow for possible comparison between the categories. To this end four schools were chosen to meet the requirements of the categories. One additional school was included in an attempt to broaden the range of socioeconomic status of parents surveyed, and because it offered a traditional university preparatory programme in four rather than five years. For a profile of each school, including enrollment, and a description of their geographical settings see Appendix B.

The number of Canadian parents enrolling their children in the secondary level of these schools for the first time in the school year 1983-84 was 338. For a

distribution of the students among the sample schools see Table 3. Canadian parents only were selected to facilitate administration of the survey and to examine school choice behaviour within a specific setting. Parents were randomly selected from each school to produce the sample size indicated in Table 4. Parents were randomly selected due to a desire to roughly equalize the various categories

TABLE 3

New Students by School

School -----	Male -----		Female -----		Total -----
	Boarding -----	Day ---	Boarding -----	Day ---	
A	39	15	38	16	108
B	79	16	0	0	95
C	0	0	30	20	50
D	0	17	0	26	43
E	0	21	0	21	42
Total	118	69	68	83	338

TABLE 4

Sample Distribution by School

School -----	Male -----		Female -----		Total -----
	Boarding -----	Day ---	Boarding -----	Day ---	
A	30	14	34	14	92
B	30	14	0	0	44
C	0	0	21	9	30
D	0	15	0	15	30
E	0	19	0	21	42
Total	60	62	55	59	236

In summary then, the sample of this study consists of 236 parents who enrolled their children in one of five Ontario member C.A.I.S. schools for the first time for the school year 1983-84.

Instrumentation

A review of the literature and empirical studies did not reveal a survey instrument appropriate to this study. Many of the empirical studies previously cited employed personal interviews or telephone surveys. The studies employing these techniques either dealt with a small sample or required the involvement of a team of researchers. Due to the scattered nature of the sample in this study and the lack of resources to conduct large scale interviews, a mail survey questionnaire was selected as the basis for data collection. This technique was deemed appropriate since, by the nature of the fees charged at the schools, the sample would be composed of a relatively homogenous socioeconomic group; and by the nature of the traditional nature of academic programmes offered, the sample would likely be composed of a relatively conservative group, therefore the response rate would be high (Bugher, 1980).

Existing survey questionnaires were deemed to be inappropriate in terms of either their complex, convoluted nature, their specificity to certain situations, or their lack of complete coverage of the factors developed in the model (Figure 4). The

questionnaire (Appendix C) developed for this study was constructed along the lines of instruments utilized by Cogan (1979), Peebles (1982), Shephard (1977) and Wayne (1980). That is, the author utilized some specific questions adapted from these studies as indicated in the right hand margin of the questionnaire in Appendix C.

Unstructured response questions as well as Likert type questions were utilized in an attempt to determine the face validity of the instrument. The nature of the reasons for change and criteria for choice indicated by the respondents in the unstructured questions, were compared to the reasons for change and criteria for choice listed in the Likert type questions. The unstructured questions also served to explore additional precipitants for change and criteria for choice.

Blishen's Revised Socioeconomic Index for Occupations in Canada (1976) was used to classify parents into socioeconomic groups as it was felt that this would be more accurate than asking respondents to indicate income. The instrument has been proven to be both reliable and valid (Blishen, 1976).

The gender and grade level of each student was

obtained from the sample schools.

Pilot Testing

A few minor changes in the wording and organization of the questionnaire were made as a result of a critical examination of the instrument by selected faculty at the College of Education, Brock University. The questionnaire was then pilot tested with twenty parents in a different member C.A.I.S. school that was similar in profile to the sample schools. The recipients answered the questionnaire as well as a respondent's evaluation sheet to obtain critical comments on the instrument. Questionnaires were mailed along with a letter of transmittal (Appendix D), and a stamped self-addressed envelope.

The return rate for the pilot study was fifteen out of twenty (75%) which was deemed sufficient for this study. Only one questionnaire was discarded due to incomplete data. The average time reported for completion of the survey was fifteen minutes and no weaknesses were reported by the respondents.

One procedural error was discovered as a result of

the pilot study, in that the Headmaster of the pilot school was allowed to mail the survey material resulting in (a) no guarantee of random selection of parents, and (b) the administration of the survey material past the dates indicated in the letter of transmittal.

Data Collection

The Headmaster of each sample school was contacted by telephone or personal visit and given a copy of the planned mailing. The author also obtained lists of names and addresses so as to prevent further procedural errors. Thus, the selection of the sample and administration of the instrument were more tightly controlled than in the pilot study. In return for participation in the survey, each school was to receive a copy of the results, with the names of the schools withheld to ensure anonymity.

The return rate after the initial mailing was 128 out of 236 (54%). An additional five responses were generated by follow-up telephone calls to check for respondent bias. The sample size for data analysis was N=133.

Data Analysis

Respondents were assigned to a socioeconomic group according to the occupation of the father reported, using Blishen's Revised Socioeconomic Index for Occupations in Canada (1976). The unstructured responses to questions 2 and 7 were grouped into appropriate categories.

The initial step in the data analysis was to construct a demographic profile of the sample using the biographical data from the questionnaire and the information provided by the sample schools on the students. This step was included to allow for possible comparison of this sample to other studies, and to provide some concrete, unique data on a group not previously studied.

The sample was then sub-divided into two family size groups for the purposes of this study: those with one or two children (small families), and those with over two children (large families).

Ordinal data on socioeconomic status was obtained by collapsing the Blishen Index values for the parents

into two roughly equal groups. The median score for the sample was 67.00 on the Blisshen Index. 64 parents were classified as high and 69 parents were classified as medium using this method.

Numerical values were assigned to the responses to questions 3 and 8 on the questionnaire: number 1 to "very important", number 2 to "important", number 3 to "unimportant" and number 4 to "very unimportant". Questions 3 a), e), and j) were collapsed to form a sub-group called "academic concerns", and a similar sub-group was formed by collapsing question 8 e), f), g) and k). Questions 3 c), d) and f) were collapsed to form a sub-group called "school climate concerns", and a similar sub-group was formed by collapsing question 8 b), d), and j). Raw scores were calculated by totalling the numerical value for each matching question and the results were rank-ordered for question 3 and then for question 8 for the following groups:

- i. all respondents
- ii. high SES respondents
- iii. medium SES respondents
- iv. parents of male students
- v. parents of female students
- vi. small families
- vii. large families.

Next, Spearman rank-order correlations were run to compare the rank-ordering between precipitants for change (question 3) and criteria for choice (question 8) for all respondents, and between high and medium SES, male and female students, small and large families.

Parents were then classified into three groups according to the range of search conducted. Passive searchers were identified as those who chose a school without considering alternatives or gathering information about the school chosen. Active narrow searchers were those who considered one school only but gathered information on the school chosen from at least two sources. Active wide searchers were those who chose a school after considering and gathering information on at least two schools. Chi square tests were run comparing SES, family size and gender of the child to range of search activity.

Parents were classified into two roughly equal groups according to the number of information sources utilized in the search process. Chi square tests were then run comparing SES, family size and gender of the child to number of information sources utilized.

Finally, the sources of information were then ranked according to their importance, and comparisons were made between SES, family size and gender of the child.

Data was rostered for the five follow-up responses, and a Spearman rank-order correlation was run between the precipitants for change for the original respondents and the follow-up. A similar test was run for criteria for choice. These two tests were run to check for respondent bias. All statistical tests were run on a Commodore 64 computer using a statistical package from the University of Liverpool.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the problems to be addressed in some detail, identified the method of drawing the sample, described the instrumentation and data collection procedures and methods of data analysis. Chapter IV will present the results of the data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The prime objective of this study was to examine the process of school choice behaviour of independent school parents from the perspective of precipitants for change, criteria for adequacy of resolution of problems, and search activities. This perspective was elaborated upon in the form of three questions to be addressed, as indicated earlier in Chapter III. This chapter presents the findings of the survey and an analysis of the results.

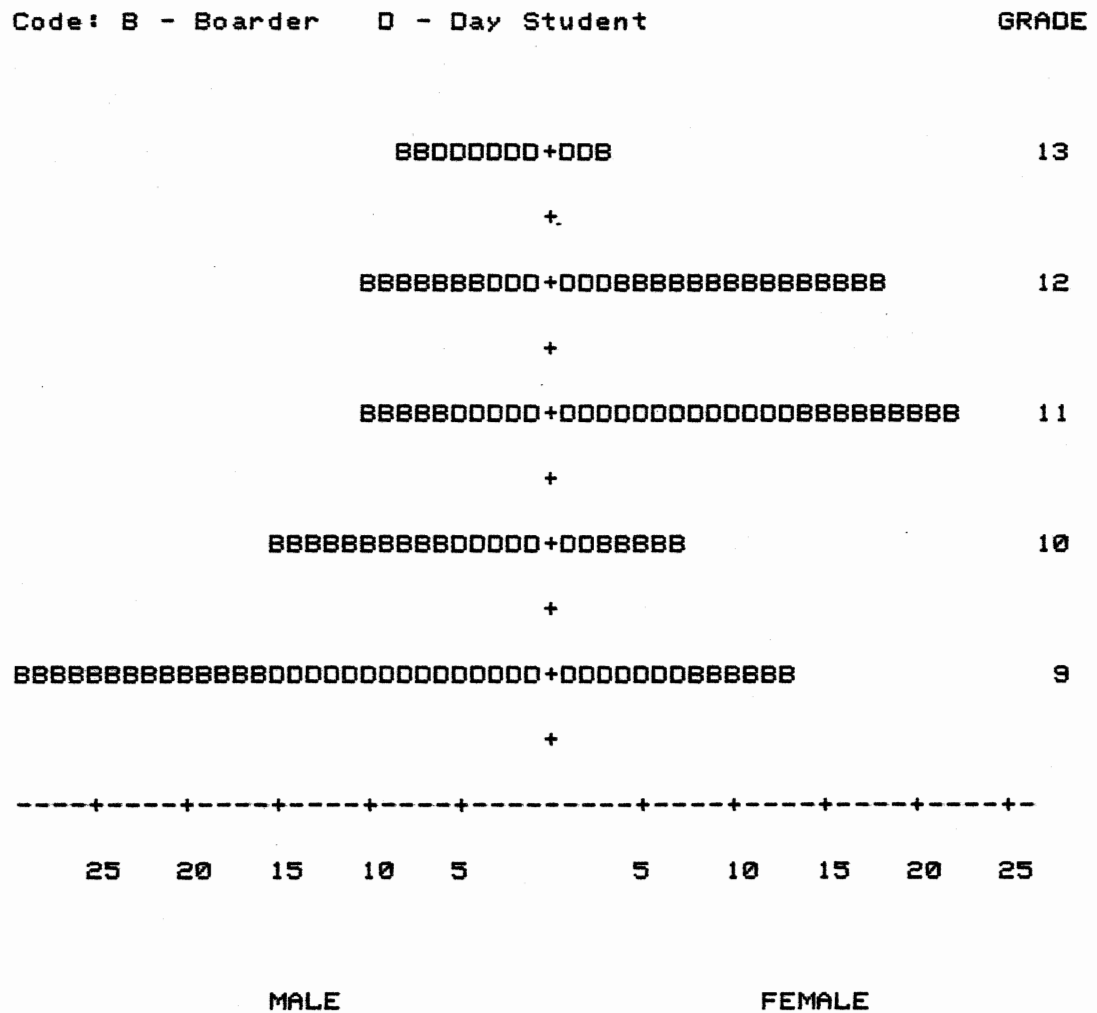
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The grade level and gender of the students involved are indicated in Figure 6. As illustrated, the majority of male students tend to be in grades 9 and 10, while the majority of female students are in grades 11 and 12. This trend is probably due to the fact that

school A, the largest school represented in the sample,
admits girls only at the grade 10 level or above.

Figure 6

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT SAMPLE



The distribution of the parents among the various socioeconomic groups, using the Blishen Index, is shown in Table 5. Approximately 73% of the parents are in the top two categories of Blishen's scale, confirming the suggestion that the sample would be composed of high socioeconomic status parents. One must bear this fact in mind when interpreting the results, as the dividing point for high and medium socioeconomic groups employed in the analysis is 67.00.

Table 5

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS	
Blishen Index	Number of Parents
20-29	3
30-39	1
40-49	5
50-59	25
60-69	51
70+	48
Missing	7

	(135)

Approximately 50% of the families consisted of one or two children (small families), and 40% of the families had other children attending independent

schools. This might suggest that one of the precipitants for change for those families with more than one child in private schools was a general dissatisfaction with the previous schooling, whereas parents with only one child out of a number, might be seeking to address the individual problems of that specific child. The previous schooling for 73% of the sample was the public education system, while 18% came from other independent schools, indicating a fairly high degree of dissatisfaction with the public system.

53% of the parents were in their forties, and 74% had education beyond the secondary school level. Unfortunately, the survey did not directly ask whether either one of the parents had attended independent schools themselves, as this would have been useful information regarding traditional ties to private education.

Responses to Unstructured Questions

Questions 2 and 7 on the survey were unstructured response questions dealing, respectively, with precipitants for change and criteria for choice. The questions were included to test the internal validity of

the instrument. Responses to these items were compared to the choices offered in the Likert type questions (3 and 8). The summaries of responses to questions 2 and 7 are presented in Tables 6a and 6b respectively.

Table 6a

FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTION #2: THE THREE MOST
IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS IN WITHDRAWING
THEIR CHILDREN FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOLS

Precipitant -----	Frequency -----
1. Dissatisfaction with academic standards or curriculum.	49
2. Class sizes too large.	46
3. Lack of guidance or discipline.	38
4. Personal reasons (eg. need for structured environment, student desire to attend, personal growth and development).	37
5. Lack of interested teachers or extra help.	34
6. Lack of motivation/performance of student/not reaching potential.	31
7. Expanded nature of educational programme and extra-curricular activities in private schools.	20
8. Influence (negative) of peer group in previous school.	19
9. Change in previous school programme (eg. semestering) or logical transition point (eg. moving from grade to grade).	18

10. Other:	
-lack of athletics	15
-no attention to study habits	14
-work-related move	12
-desire for/traditional tie with private education	12
-better preparation for university	11
-miscellaneous	39

TOTAL	395

Table 6b

FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTION #7: THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN THE SELECTION OF A SCHOOL

Consideration	Frequency
-----	-----
1. Quality of academics/standards.	70
2. Small class sizes/individual attention.	46
3. Quality of faculty, concern expressed by faculty or extra help available.	41
4. Distance to home or relatives.	34
5. Discipline.	30
6. Curriculum.	26
7. Reputation of school.	26
8. Atmosphere of school.	22
9. Athletic programme (particularly for children without high athletic ability).	14
10. Desire for boarding.	14
11. Other.	75

TOTAL	432

Responses to question 2 regarding precipitants for change of schooling were similar to the ones reviewed in the literature earlier and validate question 3 on the survey. Two new reasons for change of schooling were (1) a change in programme at the previous school (eg. semestering), and (2) lack of attention to study habits. The comments on the expanded nature of programmes at independent schools further clarify the fact that public schools may offer the same type of programmes as independent schools, but that parents perceive the programmes at independent schools to be superior.

The responses to question 7 also confirm the previously mentioned criteria and validate question 8 on the survey. Reputation of the school was one new factor mentioned often.

The prime purpose of survey questions 2 and 7 was to validate questions 3 and 8 on the survey, in terms of the precipitants for change and criteria for choice. A discussion of the rankings now follows.

Precipitants for Change

One question posed in Chapter III was designed to investigate the rank-ordering of a set of precipitants for change of schooling derived from the review of literature. The raw scores from survey question 3 and the subsequent ranking of precipitants are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

RANKING OF PRECIPITANTS FOR CHANGE

Precipitant	* Raw Score Rank	
	Raw Score	Rank
-----	-----	-----
Lack of discipline	213	1
Academic concerns	220	2
Class sizes too large	237	3
School climate concerns	307	4
Lack of suitable athletic programme	318	5
Desire for religious/moral education	328	6
Traditional tie with/desire for private education	330	7
Desire co-educational setting	428	8
Desire for single sex schooling	435	9

* The raw score was calculated by attaching the value "1" to "very important", therefore, low values are most important in the ranking.

The ranking of lack of discipline as the foremost reason for change of schooling does not support Wayne's (1980) study, in which discipline ranked fifth. However, it is important to note that Wayne was dealing with parents of elementary school children, and it is not surprising that the relationship of a student with a teacher should figure more prominently with parents of elementary school children. One might suspect that secondary school parents make a connection between a disciplined school environment and academic success, thereby accounting for the high ranking of lack of discipline as a precipitant for change. The ranking of academic concerns and class sizes in second and third position tends to support the findings of Wayne's study.

The ranking of the top three precipitants in Table 7 does tend to support Shephard's (1977) study, which ranks lack of assistance/challenge, lack of discipline and curricular concerns as the top three precipitants for change. This could be accounted for, in part, by the fact that the Shephard study included secondary as well as elementary students.

It is significant to note that the raw scores in Table 7 are very close in some instances, and that there

are also some significant change points. The ranking of the top two precipitants are determined by seven points in the raw score column, not a large difference given the nature of the survey instrument. On the other hand, the difference between class size and school climate concerns is seventy points. This would suggest that the first two precipitants are quite important to parents, while the next five precipitants fall into a different, less important category. The last two precipitants, co-ed or single sex schooling, appear to be quite unimportant in that they are separated by ninety-eight points from the preceeding group.

Sonnenfeld (1973) has posited that the nature of the precipitants for change of schooling could well affect the entire school choice process. If this is the case, then we would expect the parents in this sample to seek schools which offered disciplined environments, strong academic programmes and small class sizes. This suggestion will be explored later.

Another one of the questions posed in Chapter III attempted to determine if there were any other important precipitants for change. The survey revealed that: (1) personal reasons, such as a student's desire to attend,

or a desire for personal growth or development, (2) lack of motivation or performance on the part of a student and, (3) the negative influence of a student's peer group were also important precipitants for change, as they respectively ranked fourth, sixth and eighth among the top ten precipitants outlined in survey question 2.

The questions in Chapter III also attempted to determine the impact of socioeconomic status (SES), gender and family size on the rank-ordering of precipitants for change. Table 8 indicates the ranking of precipitants by the various sub-groups in the sample and Table 9 indicates the results of Spearman Rank Correlation tests on the rankings.

The strong positive correlation of the ranking of precipitants for change between the socioeconomic groups, males and females, and small and large families would suggest that these factors do not play a significant role in the precipitants for change. Again, it is important to recall that the range of SES in this study is not very large, and that a study covering a

Table 8

RANKING OF PRECIPITANTS ACCORDING TO SES, GENDER AND
FAMILY SIZE

	SES		GENDER		FAMILY SIZE	
	High	Med	Male	Female	Small	Large
Discipline	1	2	1	2	1	1
Academic	2	3	3	2	2	2
Class size	3	1	2	3	3	3
School climate	4	4	4	4	4	5
Athletics	5	7	5	5	5	4
Religious/moral	6	6	7	6	7	5
Tradition	7	5	6	7	6	7
Single sex	8	9	8=	9	9	9
Co-education	9	8	8=	8	8	9

Table 9

SPEARMAN TEST RESULTS: CORRELATION BETWEEN RANKINGS BY
SUB-GROUP

Correlation between	Spearman r	Significance
High/med SES groups	.88704	p<.01
Males/females	.91667	p<.01
Small/large families	.92888	p<.01

broader spectrum of socioeconomic groups might reveal some significant differences. However, within the independent schools in this sample, the factors do not appear to play a large role in determining precipitants for change. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that high SES parents ranked lack of discipline as the prime precipitant for change, while medium SES parents ranked large class sizes as most important.

Criteria for Adequacy of Resolution (School Choice)

The first major question posed in Chapter III was designed to investigate the rank-ordering of the criteria for adequacy of resolution (school choice) as derived from the literature. The raw scores from survey question 8 and the subsequent ranking of criteria are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

RANKING OF CRITERIA FOR CHOICE

Criteria	Raw Score	Rank
Attention to discipline	192	1=
Quality of academics	192	1=
Small class sizes	200	3
Favourable school climate	221	4
Quality of athletic programme	269	5
Desire for religious/moral education	290	6
Traditional tie with/desire for private education	382	7
Desire co-educational setting	388	8
Desire for single sex schooling	423	9

As shown, the ranking of criteria for choice of a school closely parallels the ranking of precipitants for change. The tied ranking of discipline and academic quality indicates that parents are more concerned about academics when choosing a new school. The raw scores indicate that a greater variation in reasons for choosing a school seems to exist than for precipitants for change. In other words, the grouping of reasons for criteria for choice is not as pronounced as it was for precipitants, although tradition, co-ed and single sex

education appear to be relatively unimportant criteria.

The survey also attempted to determine if there were any other significant criteria for choosing a school. Survey question 8 addressed this topic, and the results appeared in Table 6b. Distance to home or relatives ranked fourth on the response list, indicating that it is a relatively important criteria. The reputation of a school and its atmosphere ranked seventh and eighth respectively, indicating that these factors are important. The atmosphere of a school might well correspond to the school climate category in Table 10. A desire for boarding, mentioned fourteen times, indicates that some parents are seeking a total experience for their children.

The survey also attempted to determine the impact of SES, gender and family size on the ranking of criteria for choice. Table 11 indicates the ranking of precipitants by the various sub-groups in the sample and Table 12 shows the results of Spearman Rank Correlation tests on the rankings.

Table 11

RANKING OF CRITERIA ACCORDING TO SES, GENDER AND FAMILY SIZE

	SES		GENDER		FAMILY SIZE	
	High	Med	Male	Female	Small	Large
Academic	1	3	2	2	4	1
Discipline	2	1	1	3	2	2
Class size	3	2	3	1	1	3
School climate	4	4	4	4	3	4
Athletics	5	5	5	6	5	5
Religious/moral	6	6	6	5	6	6
Tradition	7	8	7	7	7	7
Single sex	8	9	9	9	9	9
Co-education	9	7	8	8	8	8

Table 12

SPEARMAN TEST RESULTS: CORRELATION BETWEEN RANKING OF CRITERIA

	Spearman r	Significance
High/Med SES	.95398	p<.01
Males/females	.91667	p<.01
Small/large families	.88333	p<.01

The strong positive correlation of the ranking of the criteria between socioeconomic groups, males and females, and small and large families would again

suggest that these factors do not play a significant role in determining criteria for school choice. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that academic quality is the foremost concern of the high SES group, while medium SES parents are seeking schools with disciplined environments. Parents of male students appear to be seeking disciplined environments for their sons, while parents of girls are more concerned with class sizes and academic quality. Likewise, small families seek small classes, while large families are more concerned with the general academic quality of the school. At the same time, however, one must be cautious when drawing conclusions about variations in ranking within the top three criteria as all three are very close in terms of raw scores.

The second major question posed in Chapter III dealt with correlations between precipitants for change and criteria for choice, and the impact, if any, of SES, gender and family size on the correlations. The results of the Spearman Rank Correlation tests between precipitants and criteria for the entire sample and the sub-groups are shown in Table 13.

Table 13

SPEARMAN TEST RESULTS: CORRELATION BETWEEN PRECIPITANTS
AND CRITERIA

	Spearman r	Significance
Entire sample	.99582	p<.01
High SES	.96667	p<.01
Med SES	.87867	p<.01
Males	.95	p<.01
Females	.93333	p<.01
Small families	.90	p<.01
Large families	.93725	p<.01

The results from Table 13 indicate that there is a strong positive correlation between precipitants for change and criteria for choice of a school, and that the correlation is not significantly affected by SES, gender or family size. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that high SES parents appear to have a higher correlation than medium SES parents, an observation which is worthy of further study.

The strong positive correlations between precipitants and criteria in Table 13 suggest that parents, on the whole, appear to choose schools that address sources of dissatisfaction that caused them to

seek alternate schooling for their children in the first instance.

Search Activities

The other major question posed in Chapter III dealt with the nature of the search conducted by parents prior to choosing a school. Table 14 shows the distribution of the sample and the various sub-groups into the different search pattern categories.

Table 14

SEARCH PATTERNS

	Passive	Active narrow	Active wide	Total
Entire sample	13(10%)	60(45%)	60(45%)	133(100%)
High SES	7	30	27	64
Medium SES	6	30	33	69
Males	5	33	33	71
Females	8	27	27	62
Small families	5	23	38	66
Large families	8	37	22	67

The first aspect of the investigation dealt with the range of search. Approximately 10% of the parents were classified as passive searchers, in that they chose a school without considering alternatives or seriously investigating the school chosen. The decision was likely based on prior knowledge of the school chosen, this knowledge coming from having attended the school, having other family members attending the school or being on staff. Approximately 45% of the parents were classified as active narrow searchers, in that they chose a school without considering alternatives, but gathered information on that school from at least two different sources. It is interesting to note that in most instances (60% of the cases) parents gathered information from at least four different sources. The remaining 45% of the parents were classified as active wide searchers in that they considered two or more schools after gathering information on those schools from a variety of sources.

Chi square tests were run to compare search patterns between high and medium SES groups, males and females, and small and large families. The results, as shown in Table 15, suggest that the range of search

activity is not significantly affected by SES, gender or family size. Surprisingly though, the test for family size is significant at the .05 level, suggesting that small families do search somewhat more widely than large families.

Table 15

RESULTS OF CHI SQUARE TESTS COMPARING SEARCH PATTERNS

	Chi square	DF	Probability of H0	Significance
	-----	---	-----	-----
High/Med SES	.4896	2	78.2844%	p>.01
Males/females	1.2892	2	52.4876	p>.01
Small/large families	8.2186	2	1.642%	p>.01
				(p<.05)

Part of the investigation of the search process dealt with the number of information sources utilized in the search process. Table 16 shows the number of information sources utilized for the chosen school and other schools investigated.

Table 16

NUMBER OF INFORMATION SOURCES UTILIZED

Number of sources -	0,1	2,3	4,5	6+	Total
Entire Sample	---	---	---	---	---
Chosen school	20	31	57	25	133
Other schools	79	26	20	8	133
Total	99	57	77	33	266

A Chi square test comparing the distribution of the number of sources of information for the school chosen and other schools (the data in Table 16), resulted in Chi square = 62.137, DF = 3 and a probability of the null hypothesis being correct of 0%. This result indicates that parents utilize more sources of information in researching the school chosen over other schools. As a result, one might imply that parents conduct a more in-depth search of at least one alternative compared to others. One suspects that parents conduct a general survey of schools available utilizing a few information sources, and then examine at least one alternative more carefully. This issue will be elaborated upon in Chapter V.

As well, Chi square tests were run comparing the number of information sources utilized by sub-groupings of SES, gender and family size, and, as before, it was found that these factors did not significantly ($p=.01$) affect the number of information sources utilized in the search process.

Next, an investigation of the ranking of the various sources of information was conducted. The results are shown in Table 17.

Table 17

SOURCES OF INFORMATION UTILIZED

Source	Chosen Raw	School Rank	Other Raw	Schools Rank
	---	----	---	----
Admissions	93	1	21	5
Literature	92	2	56	1
Tour	87	3	27	3
Friends	81	4	39	2
Headmaster	63	5	22	4
Personal Knowledge	31	6	12	7
Educator	19	7	9	8=
Neighbours	18	8	14	6
Media	17	9	9	8=

It is interesting to note that parents consider the admissions interview to be the most important source

of information about a school they chose, while it ranked fifth for other schools. One might expect this as an admissions interview involves a considerable amount of time and travel to the school. On the other hand, parents conducting a wide market search for possible alternatives would tend to rely upon handier sources of information, such as literature from the school. The implications of this practice will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V. Aside from the admissions interview, the rankings of the sources are quite similar.

Finally, comparisons were made (Table 18) were run between the ranking of sources of information for both chosen and other schools for sub-groupings of SES, gender and family size. There appears to be a positive correlation between ranking of sources of information, with the exception of the comparison between high and medium SES groups for the chosen school. This indicates that gender and family size do not greatly affect the ranking of sources of information for either the chosen or other schools.

Table 18

SOURCES OF INFORMATION UTILIZED FOR CHOSEN SCHOOL

Source -----	High SES		Med SES	
	Raw	Rank	Raw	Rank
	---	----	---	----
Friends	42	1=	39	4=
Admissions	42	1=	51	2
Tour	40	3	47	3
Literature	39	4	53	1
Headmaster	24	5	39	4=
Personal Knowledge	19	6	12	6=
Neighbours	11	7	7	7
Media	7	8=	10	8
Educator	7	8=	12	6=

Table 18 suggests that high SES parents tend to rely upon personal sources of information such as friends and admissions interviews (tied rank for first), while medium SES parents tend to rely upon school literature as their prime source of information. In fact, there is a complete reversal of ranking. This finding supports some suggestions made in the literature review and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V. Apart from the top ranked sources, it appears that the rankings for the other sources are quite similar.

Another interesting finding came from a comparison of the rankings made by parents of male and female students for the school chosen. Parents of male students ranked literature from the school as their prime source of information, while parents of female students ranked a school tour as the most important source. This difference in ranking might be accounted for by the feeling that male students are better able to fend for themselves. In contrast, parents of girls may be more cautious about the type of school environment their daughters are in, particularly if boarding is involved. However, this statement is purely speculative as none of the survey questions addressed this matter.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the results of the research survey, addressing the three major questions outlined in Chapter III. These questions focussed on the precipitants for change of schooling, the criteria for choice of alternate schooling and the nature of the search activity employed by parents.

The data from the survey has been presented and analyzed. Chapter V will discuss the implications of the findings, particularly as they apply to the literature review. Suggestions for future practice and research will also be tendered.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This study has attempted to answer three general questions concerning the behaviour of parents who are involved in the school choice process. Reiterated, the questions are,

- (1) What causes parents to withdraw their children from a school system?
- (2) What factors are most significant in the selection of a particular school?
- (3) What type of search is conducted prior to choosing an alternative school?

The first question was further defined in an attempt to establish a ranking for a specific set of precipitants for change, derived from the literature and outlined in Chapter III. The impact of socioeconomic status (SES), gender of the student and family size was also examined throughout the study.

A similar ranking of criteria for choice of a school, and the subsequent impact of SES, gender and family size, was conducted for the second question. One unique aspect of the study was an attempt to determine the nature of the correlation between the rankings for the precipitants for change and the criteria for school choice. Again, the impact of SES, gender and family size on the correlations was also explored.

Lastly, the nature of the search activity was examined, and an attempt to determine the impact of SES, gender and family size was considered. These questions were addressed within the framework of an adapted model for decision making presented in Figure 4.

The study utilized a mail survey questionnaire technique, the survey being directed at a sample of parents of new students in five member schools of the Canadian Association of Independent Schools. Parents were asked to indicate the relative importance of certain precipitants for change and criteria for school choice. They were provided the opportunity to add precipitants or criteria not mentioned in the questionnaire. The parents were also asked to provide

information concerning their search activities during the choice process. The data thus collected from 133 parents was analyzed by means of Spearman Rank Correlation tests and Chi square tests.

The main findings of the study are listed as follows.

1. The three major precipitants for change of schooling were, in order of importance, lack of discipline, academic concerns and large class sizes.
2. The desires for single sex or co-educational schools were least important as precipitants for change.
3. Socioeconomic status, gender of the child or family size did not appear to significantly affect the ranking of precipitants for change.
4. The three major criteria for choice of schools were, in order of importance, attention to discipline, academic quality and small class sizes.
5. The desire for single sex or co-educational schools and traditional ties with or desire for private education were least significant as criteria for choice.
6. Socioeconomic status, gender of the child or family size did not significantly affect the ranking of criteria for choice.
7. There was a strong positive correlation between the precipitants for change and criteria for school choice, which was not significantly affected by SES, gender or family size.
8. 90% of parents surveyed were active choosers, who gathered information from a variety of sources before

enrolling their children in a school. The remaining 10% were passive choosers.

9. Parents gathered more information about the chosen school than other alternatives considered.
10. Socioeconomic status, gender or family size did not significantly affect the search process, with the notable exception that high SES parents relied primarily upon personal sources of information, whereas medium SES parents relied primarily upon school literature as their prime source of information concerning the school chosen.

Some important conclusions regarding the school choice process may be drawn from the findings, particularly as they apply to independent schools in the sample. The major conclusions will now be presented and discussed in some detail.

Conclusions

1. There is dissatisfaction with the public education system, so much so, that some parents are forced to seek alternatives within the independent education system.

The findings of this study tend to confirm those of Shephard (1977) and Wayne (1980) in terms of the precipitants for change. Wayne indicated that the

dissatisfaction was often expressed by parents in terms of the disadvantages they felt their children would face if they remained in the public system.

Sonnenfeld (1973) indicated that one or a combination of a change in quality or cost of schooling, a change in perceived quality due to increased information or a change in family status or aspirations might be a precipitant for change. Sonnenfeld implies that each of these factors would result in a sense of dissatisfaction which would prompt a change of schooling.

It should be stressed, however, that cognitive dissonance could be in effect here. That is, some parents may have been reasonably satisfied with the public education system, but desired a higher quality of education in private schools. When asked to identify difficulties, these parents may have been overly critical in an attempt to rationalize a move to more costly schooling.

The fact that 73% of the sample came directly from the public education system would tend to support the claim that the dissatisfaction is primarily with the

public system. It is important to note that 18% of the sample came from other independent schools, and that dissatisfaction with schooling is by no means limited to public schools. This conclusion has particular relevance to both public and independent schools. Parents appear to be quite willing to change their children's schooling if they are dissatisfied, even at considerable cost, and schools must address the reasons for dissatisfaction identified in this and other studies.

2. Dissatisfaction stems primarily from: (1) concerns about lack of discipline, (2) concerns about academic quality, and (3) large classes.

This conclusion also confirms the findings of Shephard (1977) and Wayne (1980). However, concerns about lack of discipline and academic quality should be considered separately from the class size concerns.

Class sizes are elements about a school that can be determined relatively easily, either through published pupil-teacher ratios or visits to schools. One must be cautious, however, when discussing sources

of information about discipline and academic quality. If parents are receiving inaccurate information or impressions about schools, they may perceive problems that do not exist, or have been distorted. This problem was discussed in the context of imperfect market conditions by Garner and Hannaway (1982). It is then important for schools to ensure that the information they are distributing is accurate and effective in reaching parents. Further studies might investigate how parents gather information about schools, and attempt to measure the accuracy of the perceptions thus formed. This topic will be discussed in more detail later.

3. Parents seek out schools that appear to address the concerns which caused them to change schools initially.

Sonnenfeld has suggested that the nature of the precipitants for change will affect the entire choice process. These findings tend to support Sonnenfeld, in that parents appear to seek out schools which address their initial concerns.

In this study, the three major criteria for choice

of school are identical to the precipitants for change. Attention to behaviour and discipline, academic quality and small class sizes are all criteria that figured prominently in studies conducted by Kamin and Erickson (1981), Peebles (1982) and Wayne (1980).

Peebles identified family tradition or a long standing desire for private education as an important reason for choice. This study found that family tradition ranked seventh out of nine possibilities, approximately 182 points behind the top three ranked criteria. This would suggest that tradition is not a particularly important criterion for this sample. However, this survey did not determine if the parents themselves attended independent schools. The inquiry only determined if tradition was an important consideration in a parent's decision. Future studies would do well to determine the parents' specific schooling background to help clarify the significance of tradition as a criterion for school choice.

Again, one must discuss the issue of parental perceptions. Most public schools offer the same range of programmes, either academic or athletic, as independent schools. Indeed, most public schools offer

a wider range of academic programmes, as independent schools tend to focus on university preparatory courses. Yet, parents seem to perceive the programmes offered by independent schools as superior (Wayne 1980). For instance, the quality of athletic programmes in independent schools was ranked fifth out of nine criteria for choice, approximately 70 points behind the top three criteria.

Some of the comments in the unstructured response questions indicated that parents were seeking athletic programmes that catered to a wide variety of athletic ability. These types of programmes are widely offered in independent schools. Most independent schools also make athletics compulsory for all students, which might be an attractive proposition for some parents. Many independent schools have also gained reputations for their successful athletic teams, which might lead parents to perceive their athletic programmes to be superior.

The differences between programmes offered in public and independent schools may account for the perception that private schools are superior.

Again, when we consider the major criterion discipline, academic quality and class size, we must question the accuracy of parents' perceptions. Class sizes can be ascertained relatively accurately, although average pupil-teacher ratios may not give an accurate indication of individual class sizes. It may be the case that at the senior level, some courses in public high schools offer smaller classes than independent schools.

Academic quality is another criterion that is difficult to measure. Comparative grade averages between different schools are not easily available in Ontario. Moreover, students do not write standardized examinations which could give an indication of the comparative academic quality of different schools, data which is available in the form of S.A.T. tests in the United States. Academic quality could possibly be measured by examining the university placements of a school's graduates, however, this technique does not consider the individual graduate's inherent ability.

The nature of discipline in a school is likely ascertained by some surface impressions gained by parents during tours, or from other sources of

information. For example, most independent schools require their students to wear a school uniform, and parents might assume a certain degree of discipline from this type of requirement.

Thus, most of the decisions made by parents appear to be subjective in nature. These decisions are likely based on the past reputation of the school or impressions gained by parents from school visits. The issue of the accuracy of parental perception is one which deserves further research. One suggestion for a future study is an examination of the degree to which a school has matched the original expectations of the parents. A longitudinal study of this type could yield some profitable data on the question of perceived advantages of independent schools.

4. Parents conduct reasonably thorough searches prior to choosing a school, involving a variety of sources of information.

The majority of parents in this study (90%) were classified as active searchers using Cogan's (1979) classification. Indeed, 45% of the sample were active

wide searchers, carefully considering at least two schools prior to selection of a particular school. These findings tend to reaffirm those of Fisher (1982), Uchitelle and Nault (1977) and Wayne (1980). However, 45% of the parents in the sample were classified as active narrow searchers, considering only one alternative very carefully. This finding supports Cogan (1979), who found that 49% of her sample were active narrow choosers.

In terms of the number of sources of information utilized in the search, 62% of the parents utilized four or more sources for the chosen school, and 79% of the parents utilized less than four sources for the other schools. This indicates that parents conduct a wide general search for schools, and then carefully consider the alternative that seems to fit their needs. This search pattern supports the suggestion made by Sonnenfeld (1973), namely, that parents tend to divide alternatives into acceptable and unacceptable alternatives prior to choosing a school.

This pattern is significant for the alternative schools, in that they must survive the initial general search to receive serious consideration. Hence, it is

appropriate to examine the sources of information utilized in this general search.

The top source of information for other schools is the literature published by the school (56 mentions) followed by friends (39 mentions). This would imply that independent schools should evaluate their literature carefully, to ensure that their messages are accurate. It might be useful for public schools to publish detailed information about their school and its programmes, in order that parents might be able to compare and assess data.

The top source of information for the chosen school is the admissions interview (93 mentions) followed closely by school literature (92 mentions). It would appear that those schools which can persuade parents, possibly through their literature, to meet with a representative of the school, are more effective in recruiting students. A tour of the school was ranked third (87 mentions). Since an admissions interview often involves a tour of the school, the tour is probably more significant than the data would indicate. The tour and admissions interview could probably be classified together in a category termed personal

contact, which appears to be quite important as an information source. Friends ranked fourth as a source of information (81 mentions) for the school chosen, supporting the findings of Kamin and Erickson (1981) and Uchitelle and Nault (1977).

Kamin and Erickson suggested that the media was also an important source of information for parents. The media ranked last as a source in this study, and it would appear not to play a large role for these parents. This might be explained by differences in sampling and the type of school sampled. Independent schools in Ontario might then look to the media as a possible source for new students if the results of Kamin and Erickson's study are valid.

5. Socioeconomic status, gender of the child and family size do not appear to significantly affect the school choice process, with the exception of the effect of SES on sources of information.

The results of this study found that SES had a significant effect only on the sources of information utilized for the chosen school. In that particular instance, parents with a medium SES tended to rank

literature as the most important source of information, whereas parents with high SES ranked admissions interviews and friends as equally important sources. This finding supports Kamin and Erickson (1981), as they noted an inverse relationship between social class and the influence of school literature. The suggestion is that parents with higher SES are more critical of what schools say about themselves.

This study also found a relationship between SES and the choice process, significant at the .05 level, in that parents with higher SES had a stronger positive correlation between precipitants for change and criteria for choice. This would imply that parents with high socioeconomic status are more effective choosers.

The general lack of impact of socioeconomic status on the school choice process in this study is likely due to the high median SES of the sample (67.00 on the Blishen Index). The differences which do appear are not significant at the .01 level as indicated in Chapter IV. A study utilizing a lower median SES might have found a more significant impact on the school choice process.

One factor that helps to reduce the influence of a

high median SES is the 1982 Gallup Poll on Education. This poll indicated that public school parents would generally prefer private schools for the same types of reasons outlined in this study if provided with the opportunity.

A broader range of SES would have to be used in order to accurately test the results of previous studies. However, the high nature of fees charged at the schools in this sample probably precludes a broader range of SES.

Likewise, the results for family size did not support Gemello and Osman's (1982) findings, in that 50% of the families in this sample had three or more children. Gemello and Osman suggested that families with large numbers of children might be less inclined to send their children to private schools.

Finally, it should be noted there was no significant effect of gender of the child on the school choice process.

Implications

At the outset of this study, it was felt that the findings could provide valuable feedback to both public and private schools, as well as add to the development of school choice behaviour theory.

In term of benefits to the public schools, the identification of sources of dissatisfaction for parents who have withdrawn their children from public schools should be very important. O'Neill (1980) has suggested that:

...if present trends continue, more and more disgruntled parents will by-pass existing public systems of education. As the number of circumventors increase, they could become a volatile force, one which will ultimately have to be reckoned with within in the political arena.

(p. 48)

In times of declining enrollments, public schools should be aware of reasons for losing even more and more students. This awareness should encourage public schools to continue to evaluate and monitor their programmes to see what sources of dissatisfaction exist in their schools.

This study could also serve as a framework for action research by schools to determine if their present parents are dissatisfied with aspects of their children's education. This type of action research would, of course, be useful to independent schools as well.

Sonnenfeld (1973) makes an important comment regarding parental involvement in school choices. Research has suggested that as parents become involved in decision making in education, they begin to seek more and accurate information concerning public schools. This involvement would tend to increase awareness of public education and possibly lead to greater parental involvement in education generally.

Another possibility for the public education system is in the expansion of alternatives within the system, and the provision of a greater degree of choice for parents (O'Neill, 1980). The high positive correlation between precipitants for change and criteria for choice in this study, would tend to suggest that parents are effective choosers. If public school systems were to encourage greater choice, they might also improve the quality of education (Kraushaar, 1972).

The results of this study should also assist independent schools in developing marketing strategies. The present data on the sources of information utilized by parents in the search process, and indications of the criteria for choice that are important should be quite useful to independent schools. Indeed, Common (1983) has suggested that public schools should develop marketing strategies, and outlines a number of plans that would be useful to both public and private schools.

In terms of school choice behaviour theory, this study has confirmed some of the findings of previous studies. This study has also added an element regarding the positive correlation between precipitants for change and criteria for choice, an aspect not previously examined. It has also examined school choice behaviour within the new specific setting of Canadian Association of Independent Schools in Ontario.

Suggestions for Further Research

As stated, further research could examine how parents gather information about schools, and the accuracy of impressions gained. A longitudinal study examining the degree to which a school has matched the original expectations of its parents would be of considerable benefit in evaluating programmes. The question of why parents perceive private schools to be superior is also worthy of investigation.

The correlation between precipitants for change and criteria for choice needs to be tested utilizing a broader range of SES. A setting in Ontario providing choice to parents, with a larger range of SES, would be useful for comparative purposes.

More detailed research is also required into the sources of information utilized by parents. This study has identified the importance of a number of sources. However, it would be extremely useful to have an indication of the effectiveness and accuracy of the different sources of information.

Of particular interest would be a study which attempted to measure the accuracy of school literature in portraying a school's climate. This might involve longitudinal studies which would measure a school's effectiveness in meeting the expectations of its new parents. This is the type of action research that individual schools could carry out very easily. Parents could be asked to indicate what their expectations of a school were upon enrolling, and the various sources of information utilized in establishing those expectations. At year's end the parents would be asked to evaluate the performance of the school in comparison to their expectations. Likert's Profile of a School instrument has a parental component that might help serve this function.

Summary

This study has examined three general questions concerning school choice behaviour of independent school parents in Ontario. Given the criticism that has been levelled at secondary education in recent years, hopefully the results of this study might lead to a

further examination of the principle of school choice as part of an effort to improve secondary education in Ontario. Perhaps Kraushaar's (1972) comment is the most fitting way to conclude this discussion of school choice behaviour.

Voluntary choice provides a constructive basis for the growth of mutual responsibility and trust between the student and the school, with both parties having a stake in making the relationship work.

(p. 11)

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APPENDIX A

A DESCRIPTION OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS - ONTARIO

Ontario Independent Schools affiliated with the Canadian Association of Independent Schools have been in service to the highest standard of education in the province since 1829. Today the schools vary greatly in size and composition: the smallest has just under 100 students, the largest just under 1,000; some are day schools, some boarding, some are both; some have large primary as well as secondary enrolment, while others are entirely secondary schools; many have strong religious connections, while some are entirely secular. What they all have in common as members of the Canadian Association of Independent Schools - Ontario is that they are:

1. non-profit institutions with boards of trustees or governors removed from the daily operation of the school.
2. schools which set high standards for their students in character and attitude in addition to providing top-flight academic preparation for higher education.
3. institutions not only inspected and accredited by the Ontario Ministry of Education, but also approved for membership in the Canadian Association of Independent Schools, meeting its standards and participating in the annual conference and activities of this nationwide organization.

These 23 schools are traditional in their basic attitude and approach to education; all are firmly committed to sound instruction by dedicated teachers, and strong administrators, who deal with both students and parents on a direct and personal level. Though particular programs and emphases vary, all the schools see education in the broadest sense - intellectual, moral, physical and emotional - as being in part the responsibility of the school. While all member schools are fee-paying institutions receiving no provincial government subsidy, financial aid in the form of scholarships and bursaries is available at most, and several have financial aid budgets disbursing annually several hundred thousand dollars to deserving students with parents in many different walks of life.

(Source: Canadian Association of Independent Schools, 1983)

APPENDIX B

PROFILE AND SETTING OF SAMPLE SCHOOLS

School A:

Profile:

A school of approximately 565 students offering day and boarding programmes from grades 4 to 13. Co-educational from grades 10 to 13 and boys only from grades 4 to 9. An old established school with a traditional university preparatory programme combined with emphasis on athletic and extra-curricular activities. Anglican Church affiliation. Fees: \$4390 to \$9925 in the 1982-83 school year.

Setting:

Located in a city of 125,000 within one hour of Toronto and a number of other smaller cities.

School B:

Profile:

A school of approximately 320 students offering day and boarding programmes from grades 7 to 13. Single sex boy's school in all grades. Old established school with traditional university preparatory programme combined with emphasis on athletic and extra-curricular activities. Anglican Church affiliation. Fees: \$5500 to \$9650 in the 1982-83 school year.

Setting:

Located in a town of 10,000 within an hour of Toronto.

School C:

Profile:

A school of approximately 170 students offering day and boarding programmes from grades 7 to 13. Single sex girl's school in all grades. An old established school with traditional university preparatory programme with emphasis on athletic and extra-curricular activities. United Church of Canada affiliation. Fees: \$2700 to \$7200 in the 1982-83 school year.

Setting:

Located in a town of 30,000 within one-half hour of Toronto and environs.

School D:

Profile:

A school of approximately 840 students offering day programmes only. Co-educational in all grades from pre-Kindergarten to grade 13. Well established school with traditional university preparatory programme in secondary grades. Some emphasis on athletic and extra-curricular activities. No church affiliation. Fees: \$4200 to \$4800 in the 1982-83 school year.

Setting:

Located in a city of 300,000 within one hour of Toronto and a number of other major cities.

School E:

Profile:

A school of approximately 200 students offering day programmes only. Co-educational from grades 9 to 13, boys only from grades 4 to 8. A relatively new school with a university preparatory programme offered in four rather than the usual five years. Little emphasis on athletic and extra-curricular activities although they do exist. No church affiliation. Fees: \$3250 to \$3850 in the 1982-83 school year.

Setting:

Located in a city of 180,000 within one hour of Toronto and a number of other smaller cities.

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Ridley College

P.O. Box 3013
St. Catharines, Ontario
L2R 7C3

March 23, 1984

Dear Parent,

I am writing with the permission of the Headmaster, Mr. Packard, to seek your assistance in completing the enclosed questionnaire. I am attempting to determine why parents enroll their children in Independent Schools as part of my Graduate Studies in Education at Brock University and am most interested in your input.

The results of the survey could be of considerable value to your child's school in refining admissions procedures and increasing awareness of parental concerns. Although the results of the survey will be sent to Mr. Packard, your individual responses will be kept strictly confidential.

In addition to Ridley, the survey is being conducted in four other major Independent Schools in Ontario and should provide a broad base of information for these schools. I do hope that you will take a few moments to complete the questionnaire and mail it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope by April 2.

If I can provide you with additional information about the research or its implications, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address. Thank you for your co-operation in this important matter.

Sincerely,

George L. Briggs
Housemaster

APPENDIX D

PILOT STUDY EVALUATION FORM

Respondent's Evaluation of the Survey

1. Would you please indicate the approximate time required for you to complete the questionnaire?

2. Did you find the letter of explanation clear and free of errors? If not, please indicate weaknesses.

3. Did you find any of the questions or responses confusing or vague? If so, please indicate the specific areas.

4. Please feel free to add any critical comments or suggestions.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

APPENDIX E

SCHOOL CHOICE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

School Choice Questionnaire

Sample # _____

According to your child's school , your child was enrolled in the school as a new student for the academic year 1983-1984.

1. Did your child transfer from the public education system?

YES

NO

If no, please indicate the nature of the previous school:

_____ other independent school

_____ out-of-province

_____ separate school system

_____ other (please specify below)

2. What were the three most important considerations in your decision to remove your child from the previous school attended?

Wayne
(1980)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. Listed below are factors which some researchers have suggested for parents deciding to withdraw their children from public or independent schools. Please examine each factor and rank it according to the importance you would give it. (Please circle the corresponding number for each reason.)

Cogan
(1979)
and
Shephard
(1977)

	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant
a. Low academic standards in the school.	1	2	3	4
b. Lack of discipline in the school.	1	2	3	4
c. Child having bad experiences with teacher(s).	1	2	3	4
d. School personnel not listening to our concerns.	1	2	3	4
e. Teachers not providing enough assistance or challenge in learning.	1	2	3	4
f. Child having bad experiences with other children in school.	1	2	3	4
g. Other parents deciding to withdraw their children.	1	2	3	4
h. Long-standing preference for private education.	1	2	3	4
i. Desire for religious/moral education.	1	2	3	4
j. Dissatisfaction with curriculum/teaching methods.	1	2	3	4
k. Lack of athletic programme.	1	2	3	4
l. Desire for residential experience.	1	2	3	4
m. Change required due to work-related move.	1	2	3	4
n. Desire for co-educational school.	1	2	3	4
o. Desire for single-sex school.	1	2	3	4
p. Classes were too large	1	2	3	4
q. Attraction to a special programme. (Please specify)	1	2	3	4
<hr/>				
r. Other (Please specify)	1	2	3	4

...3/

-3-

4. Was your child's present school the only school you considered?

YES NO

Wayne
(1980)

If no, what other schools did you consider?

5. Before you enrolled your child in the present school did you get information about this school from: (Please circle as many as relevant)

Cogan
(1979)

Neighbours	YES	NO
Friends	YES	NO
Media	YES	NO
Literature from the school	YES	NO
The Headmaster	YES	NO
An admissions interview	YES	NO
Tour of the school	YES	NO
An educator in your community	YES	NO
No one, because I knew the school	YES	NO
No one	YES	NO
Other (please specify)	YES	NO

6. Before you enrolled your child in the present school did you get information about other schools from: (Please circle as many as relevant) Cogan (1979)

Neighbours	YES	NO
Friends	YES	NO
Media	YES	NO
Literature from the school	YES	NO
The Headmaster	YES	NO
An admissions interview	YES	NO
Tour of the school	YES	NO
An educator in your community	YES	NO
No one, because I knew the school	YES	NO
No one	YES	NO
Other (please specify)	YES	NO

7. When choosing a school for your child what were the three most important factors you considered? Wayne (1980)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

8. In choosing a school for their children, some people have considered the following factors. Please look at each factor and rank it according to the importance you would give it. (Please circle the corresponding number)

	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Cogan (1979) and Shephard (1977)
a. The school was close to home	1	2	3	4	
b. The general atmosphere of the school was the sort we wanted for our child	1	2	3	4	
c. The school provided religious/moral education	1	2	3	4	
d. The Headmaster's attitude toward children was good	1	2	3	4	
e. Preparation for future university/career	1	2	3	4	
f. The school's curriculum was good	1	2	3	4	
g. Former students' achievement was high	1	2	3	4	
h. The childrens' backgrounds were similar to ours	1	2	3	4	
i. The school was on the way to work	1	2	3	4	
j. The Headmaster and teachers were accessible	1	2	3	4	
k. Quality of instruction	1	2	3	4	
l. Problems with previous school	1	2	3	4	
m. The physical facilities were good	1	2	3	4	
n. Attention to behaviour and discipline	1	2	3	4	
o. Special programmes offered	1	2	3	4	
p. My child's non-academic and personal needs	1	2	3	4	
q. Co-educational school	1	2	3	4	
r. Single-sex school	1	2	3	4	
s. Small class sizes	1	2	3	4	
t. Athletic programme was good	1	2	3	4	
u. Whether you or a relative had attended an independent school	1	2	3	4	
v. Other (Please specify)	1	2	3	4	

-6-

To help clarify your answers statistically would you please answer the following biographical questions. Your answers will be strictly confidential.

9. Please circle the highest education level completed. Check only the last school attended.

	Father	Mother
Elementary	1	1
Secondary	2	2
Community College	3	3
University degree	4	4
Post-graduate degree	5	5
Other (Please specify)	6	6

10. Please indicate your age.

	Father	Mother
30-34	1	1
35-39	2	2
40-44	3	3
45-49	4	4
50-54	5	5
55-60	6	6
over 60	7	7

11. How many children are there in your family?

___ one ___ two ___ three ___ four ___ five or more

12. Do you have any other children who are attending independent schools?

YES NO

13. Father's occupation. Please be as accurate as possible. For example, write "car salesman" rather than "salesman", or write "elementary teacher" rather than "teacher". Use two or more words if necessary. If you are unemployed, retired or on workman's compensation, please state what your occupation is when active.

14. Mother's occupation. (Please see instructions in question 13 above.)

Please feel free to add any additional comments on the back of this page.
Thank you for your co-operation.